

## Twice Drowned

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Summary: Surviving the sinking did Alvin no favors. What was the point? With everything else crashing down around him, something unthinkable sounded so reasonable. [Warnings: angst, spoilers for post Zenethra, Alvin-centered, one shot]

## Twice Drowned

That was it. The orange sky cut above the port was no different than it had ever been. Nothing about the schism had changed. The trip. Everything aboard the Zenethra. That was it.

\_It was pointless. \_

The thought pounded at his skull from the moment it occurred to him, when he let the words slip and even after he'd turned his back on everyone else at the dock. He had let Milla kill herself for \_nothing\_. Those words, that idea, the fact that it was reality, all of it tore at Alvin's mind and nerves.

If he'd let Jude stop her. If he'd done it himself. Another way might have shown up. Maybe things would have even worked out somehow too. It could have just fallen together for once. Just \_once\_ things could work out. It was wishful, stupid, naïve thinking.

He didn't know how long it had been since he left Jude and everyone else at the sea's edge. If he stopped it felt like he might not get back up so once he turned his back, he kept walking. As far as he might go though he knew the truth of it: there was no where left to go.

There was no going home and there was no home here in Rieze Maxia. Maybe there wasn't even a home left for him in Elympios. With the group there had been some hope but now there was nothing. The lance, his uncle and Milla sank to the bottom of the ocean.

Whatever was left of Exodus was bound to shatter into tiny pieces. They didn't look to Alvin for support or guidance. No, Alvin was extra weight for them as well. And with Jude and the rest there was no turning back. He wasn't needed at Jude's side, not when the kid knew every damn thing for himself. A stupid, matureâ€frustratingly matureâ€kid like that would work something out. \_Let \_him work it out, deal with it. Even from the start Milla had her eyes on him; a gaze that was different from the one Alvin received. At this point she probably would have finally quit and cast him off, if only she hadn't cast herself out first. Not Jude though. No, Jude probably had a head full of thoughts and blame pointed Alvin's way. Not that he would blame him. There must have been something he could have done.

\_It's too late.\_

There was no going back. There was never any going back and Alvin knew that. Things were not so simple as re-doing them or fixing it. Things \_happened \_without rhyme or reason or care. Spirits let their own fall. They let this misshapen world take form and people suffered with no cause, no justice, no karma to tie it all in a neat little bow at the end.

His own quiet sufferings he'd choked far, far down stirred up to the surface; gasping and thrashing in the pool he'd worked so hard to try and drown it all in. One splash sent enough ripples to pour everything else onto the very top.

Mind a wreck, his legs carried him further and further still from the port. Light dimmed and the path led him on. Anywhere would be fine to go. Anywhere at all would be better than keeping still. At some point Alvin stopped. Exhaustion beat him to a halt; his body falling at the water's edge out of the way off the regular path. Sea water lapped at the edge of his boots; his body almost sinking into the sand with comforting feeling. It would be alright to stop there for just a bit longer. A little longer he could stop and stay.

Thoughts bubbled up and passed again; almost in a timed ebb and flow with the tide nearby. Pain had dulled to an ache and he could almost think about things clearly now. Milla was dead. Completely and utterly lost. There was no body to mourn over; no proper last goodbyes.

This was it.

A cold, quiet feeling settled over his chest. Alvin knew the feeling and there was almost something even more disheartening about that. That sense of hopelessness wasn't new. He knew it inside and out. He could still remember the frightened looks on everyone's faces when they had all wound up on this side. Gilland took control and kept everyone in order, but even at that age Alvin knew his uncle was shaken up. Over time the fright was replaced with something else. Something cold and dark. There was a dead look in so many of the Exodus agents' eyes after awhile. They were alive somehow, but home was so very far away. After so many years it felt hopeless. Alvin knew the feeling too. That was why he spent his life in the moment; trying to exist only there so the past and future couldn't grasp claws in.

If he could find happiness in the short of the moment maybe it would

be alright. Maybe it would have been alright. He'd seen the hope for the future shredded before his eyes. Gilland was dead at his own hands and Milla may as well have been the same. Everything sank; rotting in the pit of the ocean.

He couldn't work out why he wasn't down there too.

It seemed sudden that there was another figure not far off. He'd not heard anyone come by. The form floated over lazily, stopping just a short distance from him. Alvin realized they were floating over the water. Of course that would be how it would go, wouldn't it?

"My oh my...someone isn't looking too well. That's not very good, is it?" Muzet began with an almost playful tone.

"If you're gonna do it, just do it," Alvin muttered dryly.

A soft chuckle. "I want to know where the rest are, not just you."

Alvin started to push himself up slowly. He wasn't going to fight—he didn't have the strength for that, but he could at least face this monster. "I don't know where they are. Split up."

Now that he could see her face properly Alvin noted Muzet still smiled through that answer. She almost looked friendly. "I wonder if someone like you could find them for me," she said, almost musing over the idea.

Alvin tensed briefly before getting the rest of the way to his feet. Their gazes met evenly; Muzet's lips still curved into a soft, welcoming smile. "You're from Elympos, aren't you? You're not even supposed to be here, you poor thing."

Her hands clapped together lightly, like something had just come to mind. "You'd love to go home, wouldn't you? That sounds so much better than staying here, I'm sure."

It had to be a taunt. Any second Muzet would tear him apart and it would be over. He felt so old thinking about how long he'd been trapped away, watching his mother slip further and further. Thoughts felt so cloudy even though Muzet's voice was sharp, clear. The next words cut through.

"Listen...You find and kill everyone in Milla's little group and I'll send you home. I bet it's almost exactly how you'd remember it too," Muzet coaxed, her voice dipping a touch lower. Her hands reached out for Alvin's throat but in his shock he didn't pull away. Neatly, her fingers took to straightening up his scarf and setting the fabric right at his neck.

"...Are you serious?"

Muzet chuckled daintily once more, petting the scarf down properly once she was done. "I'm very serious. You've seen what I can do, haven't you? It's all for Lord Maxwell so...do him this favor and we'll see you home." She couldn't contain herself and laughed a little more. "You poor dirty little thing. But if anyone can find them right now, I'm sure it's you. And you more than anyone wants to go home, don't you? Finish them off and then I'll get you there. You

have my word."

Up this close it was hard to avoid her eyes and the blissful look behind them. More than anything she loved fulfilling her mission. Maybe it would feel good to have some kind of reason, some kind of in. A point a goal. Muzet's fingers wandered to fix Alvin's collar for him and then offered him one hand, fingers open in the small space between them. It seemed like she were made of the air itselfâ€"a devilish breezy whispering promises in his ear. Slowly, Alvin put his hand in her's and she gently shook it.

"There we go. We have a deal. I promised you and you're promising me. I'm looking forward to wonderful results," she said as she patted the top of his hand. Just as suddenly as she'd appeared she left and Alvin was again at the shore alone, water lapping up higher at his heels.

Alvin tried natural motions first. His now empty hand drifted to his hair, running through it and setting it closer to right again and out of his face. He brushed sand off his clothes. He checked and loaded his gun. Once he got that far his feet started moving toward his first guess.

Home sounded sweet. It sounded so sweet after so many years on this side, struggling. Struggling all the time just to even keep up. The faster he could be out of this prison the better. What did it matter how now? Every other effort on this side was useless anyway.

He was going to find Jude first and make sure he understood. It was all overâ€"even for Milla's precious favorite, for the one she looked at like \_that. \_None of any of this mattered, it never did. He'd drag him down too if he had to. Every last one of them was going to drown if Milla had toâ€"if he had to.

\* \* \*

><p>It felt like the core of his body had been hallowed out. When he first sat up in bed, dizziness took over along with that weak feeling in his arms. It was a weakness that was his own fault and Alvin knew that.<p>

Memories were fuzzy, but he remembered the wyvern, he remembered the trip over wherever this wasâ€"where it was he wasn't sure yetâ€"and from there it all jumbled together. He must have passed out at some point. He'd gotten into bed somehow, it was obvious he needed help. His arm was over Presa's shoulders, he'd dragged himself along with her, he thought at least. He didn't want to stick around to ask.

Movement hurt when he tried to get himself up further. Half-giving up, he looked himself over. There were bandages where they were needed, but for the most part he seemed to be in one piece. Considering the damage Jude had doneâ€"how angry he wasâ€"Alvin was probably lucky to alive. The thought sent a revolting feeling rolling through his stomach.

\_Why am I still here?\_

The memory of Jude's punches across his face were so fresh it felt like he were still there swinging at him. He didn't even have the

heart to finish, to do it properly. For everything Alvin had done he knew Jude should have finished it. He could ask and still be denied, of course. The kid was too mature, too big to do such a thing. Something about that made it sting worse.

He and Milla both. Both of them were too much, too much more than he had ever been. They could face it, they could deal with things at the end, even if they were difficult. Jude seemed to understand what he wanted in that moment. But Milla wasn't there. She'd died a pointless death and Jude expected him to just get up and keep living.

\_For what reason? What purpose? \_

Maybe for Jude it was revenge. No, to fix things somehow. It was impossible. And Alvin was empty handed. Nothing to grasp and very tired. That weariness encompassed everything.

Alvin leaned up against the wall aside the bed, his vision unfocused, but fixed on the opposite wall. Faintly, he saw his jacket hang up over an adjacent chair with his scarf draped over it neatly. In the seat his shirt was folded properly, gloves laid out on top. Weapons and anything he carried were all set purposefully aside; out of reach but not too far. Presa wasn't usually the type to clean up after him. Was it her doing?

Maybe she left him in the care of someone else. She had no reason to stick around after all. As if timed to set him straight, he heard footsteps from the doorway, heels to the floorboards. That stride, her pace, everything felt very familiar very quickly. It was an annoying thing to be able to remember.

The sound of her heels grew closer until she passed through the doorway into the room. Fairly immediately she caught sight of Alvin leaning up against the wall in bed. Brief surprise and slight concern crossed her features, but she sent it away within a few seconds. Alvin couldn't say he'd deserved the worry.

Presa looked like she wanted to say something; instead she took her time setting what she'd carried in on the small table next to Alvin's belongings. He could tell she was buying herself some time. He left her be and found himself watching absent-mindedly. Something was coming, it was just a matter of how long she would wait to start it.

Shortly Presa turned around and looked Alvin over more directly. "I see you didn't run away this time," she began simply.

At first he didn't acknowledge her or what she's said. There was no right way to dodge it, no way to squirm out of this was some shred of himself left. No, anything and everything he had here to gain or lose was gone. He imagined she would kick him out of this place as soon as he could stand.

"I couldn't," he answered late and hoarsely.

"I suppose that's what you get when you throw yourself into what you did."

Presa was as sharp as ever. He would have tried to laugh or play it off like always, but that strength to smile and fake it had left him.

Whatever remained was all Presa would get. In that instant he understood. She knew too much. He shouldn't have been here or sent that letter. This person, this one singular person had spent enough time with him that she understood. It scared the hell out of him, but there was just no energy to run. Nothing left he could flee with. She had swooped in, picking up nothing but a dry carcass. But this was the last place left to go. He had no one else, even if she did pick his bones clean.

When he failed to reply, Presa shook her head and moved back into the adjacent room. Whatever she was doing Alvin didn't care. A larger piece of him hoped she wouldn't come back. Soon he picked up on the sound of water; a soft drop into a surely short container. A moment later Presa returned, a small glass of water in her hands. Paused at the side of the bed she looked down Alvin's way, but he did not turn his head. The glass was set at the corner of the nightstand and momentarily, she lingered nearby.

"Whatever happened you don't need to explain; I have a pretty good guess," she said flatly. "That letter you sent...you gave away where you were going to be."

He remained silent. There was no way to really reply to that without making matters worse. Presa didn't take the cold shoulder very well either.

"That spirit you made a deal with... you do realize she could come back to deal with you for failing." She paused once more, moving across the room to pick up a chair from the table and set it aside the bed. With a certain grace, she sat herself down, one leg crossed over her knee. "And you realize this is a risk not just for you but myself as well."

"I never asked for your help."

He could tell Presa was holding back. The twitch in her fingers at her lap, the way she straightened up in her seat; he wasn't looking directly at her, but he knew she was fighting every instinct she had to hit him. "Really? What was your letter about; wanting to see me one last time? That sounds like a cry for help to me," Presa said with some bitterness in her tone. She always sounded like that now it seemed.

It felt like so long ago now that she'd ever spoken his name with any affection. It was just another memory, a hallow feeling in his shell that joined all the others. Another thing that he had ruined and lost. He didn't have the guts to look her in the eyes anymore; talking with her like this was hard enough.

"I never did anything else right with you...Thought I could say goodbye at least," he edged out, keeping his voice down.

"'Goodbye?' That was it then? That sorry little letter had your last words to me? You're more pathetic than I thought. I can't even guess what you expected from me," she lashed back, some of her anger reined back.

"Closure...? I don't know."

Her eyes narrowed and she leaned in closer, trying to get Alvin to

look at her. He refused, at least until she spoke. When his eyes finally did look her way, he could see how offended she was behind her calmer demeanor. "I was supposed to find closure in you just saying 'goodbye' to me? I don't think you understand what that means."

"I don't then," he agreed, more out of the hope that he could lessen whatever blow was coming than really understanding. That might have made it worse really.

"Closure means it's done. It's behind you and you're ready to move on. If you wanted to give me closure, you wouldn't say you wished you'd seen me again. You would have enjoyed our last. But then again knowing you, words like that could have been a lie," she explained, keeping put closer. With her gaze so fixed on his own, Alvin found it hard to look away now. "It's always a lie with you."

"I meant it. I did...want to see you before it was all over," he admitted, forcing his eyes down to avoid her's once more. It was too much to say in too difficult of a position.

Presa shifted slightly, taking her time to work out what those words meant. There was no reason to rush in and get taken over in the moment. After a few quiet seconds, she spoke a bit softer. "Here I am then. Are you ready for it to be all over now?"

It was condescending. Alvin turned his head away and focused on the wall again. He didn't have to answer that at any point and nor did he want to. Lips sealed, he let himself lean up against the wall with his focus in staying there. Presa sat back in her chair again, her arms crossed.

"You lie so much you do it to yourself, you know," she reminded him. He knew. Hell, he knew. He probably always knew. It still stung to hear. "I can't even know if you ever once told me the truth about anything."

"...I wanted to be honest with you so badly, Presa," Alvin uttered. She wouldn't believe him despite meaning. It didn't matter. "You always were too good for me."

Presa's expression shifted to disgust—her eyes sharp behind her glasses. "I'm not here to have a pity party for you. You figure out what you want to do, what you actually want for once. I'm not here to guide you and I won't take care of you either. You're your own responsibility. You have to deal with yourself before anyone else can."

Alvin shifted slightly against the wall, feeling heavy. He watched her for a moment. Briefly he recalled the way she used to look at him—the softer smiles, the light in her eyes, a bit unsure but willing to risk giving him a shot. His skin still remembered the way her hands felt, the way her face heated, the brief kisses before parting. Now a glass wall kept them parted. It was one he knew better than to shatter. He turned his eyes away.

"I'll get out of your hair as soon as I can get up," he muttered.

Presa eyed him carefully. What she was searching for, he didn't know.

"Where will you go?"

A question he didn't have an answer for: of course. She was always good at that. "Don't know yet."

"You're not going back to that group?" she said a bit lower, leaning in closer again. It was hard to avoid her gaze with those inches pulled in closer. Was that concern in her tone?

"They'll kill me. I don't have anywhere anymore," he admitted quietly. Maybe that wasn't true. After everything Jude said maybe he would...No that was ridiculous.

Presa took a deeper breath, almost looking perplexed by him—he like were some kind of puzzle she hadn't been able to completely put together yet. There were always pieces missing. "I don't want to let you go if you're just going to turn out how I found you. I don't...hate you that much, Al."

His gaze turned her way and she glanced aside. "Don't get me wrong. I just won't turn you back out if you're only going to try and get yourself killed again."

"I was so sure that would be the better outcome for you," Alvin said quietly.

"It probably is, but I at least have enough of a sense of guilt not to do that. Not even to you."

Alvin let those words sink in. No better than dirt and still Presa could afford him some kindness. "Far better than I ever deserved. I...don't think I've figured everything out yet, but...thanks for doing all this."

Presa looked honestly surprised, quickly turning her focus away and adjusting her glasses. "I really shouldn't have. But I have. I guess this is partially my fault so I'll do what I can, but you need to find your answers on your own. However...if you search yourself and you're still unsure...Gaius can and will guide whoever needs him."

In all honesty, he thought Gaius might kill him too, but he would trust Presa's word. "Sounds kinda nice."

"His mission and drive are completely reliable and consistent. He is a good man...one I respect deeply. Despite everything he's stood firm through everything. If you have no where to turn...join us Al." Just barely he caught a hint of longing in her voice. How long had it been since they could properly stand side by side? Since they had even shared a goal or a thought? A single dream? What possessed him to stop looking for somewhere to share with her? Everything about Presa and her words felt so comforting—so much closer to an idea of home.

"I'll go with you Presa...Wherever you can use me," Alvin agreed after a short silence. It was slight, but she smiled.

"Good. Focus on healing for now...We'll have orders to move out before too long." Gently her hand rested at his shoulder, trying to coax him into laying back down. That hadn't changed too much at



leastâ€"it only hurt a little this time. He does as he's told, resting back and looking at her expression with some small sense of ease. It was a tiny thing, but enough to rest on. Himself he could work out, for now this small offer would do. Even the tiniest thread felt more whole than anything else he'd seen in some time.

If that brief second could just last...

End  
file.